

Cat Enrichment

Despite their independence, cats need plenty of enrichment to stimulate their minds and instinctive behaviors. Thankfully, you can enrich your cat's environment with just a few simple adjustments to your home, inexpensive DIY toys, and a bit of your time each day.

Elements of an Enriched Environment

- Perches and things to climb on – cats like to get high! You can find tutorials online for how to make your own cat tower.
- Scratching posts – cats have to scratch. You can find tutorials online for how to make your own scratching post.
- Things to watch - a fish tank, a comfy spot by a window, or even occasional nature shows on TV can be enjoyable for your cat. Entice birds and squirrels to play in front of your windows with feeders! You can make this yourself or purchase at your local garden center.
- Positive Training - cats don't respond well to force, but do respond well to positive reinforcement. Treats, play and petting can all serve as rewards. Treats can be more effective if you keep your cat to scheduled meals rather than free feeding.
- Hiding spaces - a room, closet, cabinet or other space where the cat can get away from everyone for a while each day. There are covered cat beds that can serve this purpose available for purchase online.
- Separate feeding area - Maintain at least 12 feet between your cat's litterbox and food/water. Ideally, these should be in separate rooms so your cat doesn't have to deal with the competing smells.
- Privacy for using litter box - not all cats appreciate covered litterboxes so make sure that your cat has an area that is protected from other pets, loud noises (such as a washer/dryer), and human traffic. A guest bathroom or garage with a cat door, or held open with a device to keep kids and dogs out. If you're handy and don't mind screws in your walls, a bungee cord and fasteners can work - or buy a product online like a Door Buddy.
- A clean cat box - especially if sharing with other cats. Many cats prefer that their litterbox is cleaned at least once daily. Litters with automatic cleaners are available for purchase online, but read reviews and the return policies first - they have varying degrees of success and can be expensive. Lastly, your cat doesn't particularly care how much you paid for the litterbox - if they don't like it, they won't use it. You can try testing their willingness to use a certain shape of litterbox by getting crafty with cardboard first!
- Veterinary care delivered with kindness. Training your cat to accept and enjoy a cat carrier can go a long way in reducing the stress of visiting the veterinarian's office. FearFreePets.com has tips on how to reduce your cat's stress when placed in a carrier.
- Comfortable bedding in comfortable places. Whether your cat likes to relax in the corner, on the back of the couch, or in the windowsill, try to ensure they have a blanket or soft bed to relax on. Blankets also protect your furniture from shedding.
- Cat nip - keep a container of cat nip around or buy catnip stuffed toys. Try to use it just a few times a week so your cat gets that special engagement occasionally rather than every day.
- Toys to bat, chase and carry - purchase or make yourself! You can make cat toys out of several items that you would normally discard. Empty toilet paper rolls, plastic bottle caps and scraps of felt or twine can make automatic cat toys. Your cat might enjoy string or hair bands, but don't let them play with those unsupervised - or, if they are prone to ingesting items, keep them out of their reach.
- An opportunity to hunt or work to receive food. Look online or in stores for cat feeding toys - some of these look like mice and can be stuffed with kibble. You can also purchase a small KONG toy or an ice cube tray to freeze tuna and yogurt for a frozen treat, or put a small bit of tuna in a match box or toilet paper roll with the ends closed. The goal of these is to get your cat to work for the treat!
- The ability to properly groom. This can be difficult for large or overweight cats. If your cat is having a hard time grooming themselves, help them out with regular, daily grooming in those hard to reach areas. Shorthair cats can be brushed as little as once or twice a month, but medium and longhair cats will need brushing once or twice a week.
- Interaction with humans including interactive play and affection. Try to take just a few minutes out of every day to engage in play with your cat.
- Interaction with other animals if your cat enjoys them or no interactions with other animals if they dislike them.